

Kissinger's 1969 National Security Study Memo: The Questions

Following is the text of a draft summary of responses to National Security Study Memorandum 1. It was prepared in early 1969 by various government agencies in answer to questions submitted by presidential adviser Henry Kissinger and his staff (guide to abbreviations at end of text):

VIETNAM QUESTIONS

Environment of Negotiations

1. Why is the DRV in Paris? What is the evidence?

Among the hypotheses:

- Out of weakness, to accept a face-saving formula for defeat.
- To negotiate the withdrawal of U.S. (and NVA) forces, and/or a compromise political settlement, giving a chance for NLF victory in the South.
- To give the U.S. a face-saving way to withdraw.
- To undermine the GVN and U.S./GVN relations, and to relieve U.S. military pressure on both North and South Vietnam.
- Out of desire to end the losses and costs of war on the best terms attainable?

2. What is the nature of evidence, and how adequate is it, underlying competing views (as in the most recent NIE on this subject, with its dissenting footnotes) of the impact of various outcomes in Vietnam within Southeast Asia?

3. How soundly-based is the common belief that Hanoi is under active pressure with respect to the Paris negotiations from Moscow (for) and Peking (against)? Is it clear that either Moscow or Peking believe they have, or are willing to use, significant leverage on Hanoi's policies? What is the nature of evidence, other than public or private official statements?

4. How sound is our knowledge of the existence and significance of stable "Moscow" and "Peking" factions within the Hanoi leadership, as distinct, for

example, from shifting factions, all of whom recognize the need to balance off both allies? How much do we know, in general, of intraparty disputes and personalities within Hanoi?

NVA/VC

5. What is the evidence supporting various hypotheses, and the overall adequacy of evidence, relating to the following questions:

- Why did NVA units leave South Vietnam last summer and fall?
- Did the predicted "third-wave offensive" by the NVA/VC actually take place? If so, why did it not achieve success?
- Why are VC guerrillas and local forces now relatively dormant? (Among the hypotheses: 1) response to VC/NVA battle losses, forcing withdrawal or passivity; 2) to put diplomatic pressure on U.S. to move to substantive talks in Paris; 3) to prepare for future operations; and/or 4) pressure of U.S. and allied operations.)

6. What rate of NVA/VC attrition would outrun their ability to replenish by infiltration and recruitment, as currently calculated? Do present operations achieve this? If not, what force levels and other conditions would be necessary? Is there any evidence they are concerned about continuing heavy losses?

7. To what relative extent do the U.S./RVNAF and the NVA/VC share in the control and the rate of VC/NVA attrition; i.e., to what extent, in terms of our tactical experience, can heavy losses persistently be imposed on VC/NVA forces, despite their possible intention to limit casualties by avoiding contact?

(Among the hypotheses:

- Contact is predominantly at VC tactical initiative, and we cannot reverse this; VC need suffer high casualties only so long as they are willing to accept them, in seeking contact; or
- rates can be maintained by present forces—as in-

creased X% by Y additional forces—whatever the DRV/VC choose to do, short of further major withdrawal.)

8. What controversies persist on the estimate of VC Order of Battle; in particular, on the various categories of guerrilla forces and infrastructure? On VC recruiting, and manpower pool? What is the evidence for different estimates, and what is the overall adequacy of evidence?

9. What are NVA/VC capabilities for launching a large-scale offensive, with "dramatic" results (even if taking high casualties and without holding objectives long), in the next six months? (e.g., an offensive against one or more cities, or against most newly "pacified" hamlets.) How adequate is the evidence?

10. What are the main channels for military supplies for the NVA/VC forces in SVN, (e.g., Cambodia and/or the Laotian panhandle)? What portion of these supplies come in through Sihanoukville?

A. What differences of opinion exist concerning extent of RVNAF improvement and what is evidence underlying different views? (e.g., compare recent CIA memo with MACV views.) For example:

- Which is the level of effective, mobile, offensive operations? What results are they achieving?
- What is the actual level of "genuine" small-unit action in ARVN, RF and PF? i.e., actions that would typically be classed as such within the U.S. Army, and in particular, offensive ambushes and patrols? How much has this changed?

e. How much has the officer selection and promotion system, and the quality of leadership, actually changed over the years (as distinct from changes in paper "programs")? How many junior officers hold commissions (in particular, battlefield commissions from NCO rank) despite lack of a high school diploma?

d. What known disciplinary action has resulted from ARVN looting of civilians in the past year (for example, the widespread looting that took place last spring)?

e. To what extent have past "anti-desertion" decrees and efforts lessened rate of desertion; why has the rate recently been increasing to new highs?

f. What success are the RF and PF having in providing local security and reducing VC control and influence in rural populations?

11. To what extent could RVNAF—as it is now—handle the VC (Main Force, local forces, guerrillas), with or without U.S. combat support to fill RVNAF deficiencies, if all NVA units were withdrawn:

- If VC still had Northern fillers.
- If all Northerners (but not regroupes) were withdrawn.

12. To what extent could RVNAF—as it is now—also handle a sizeable level of NVA forces:

- With U.S. air and artillery support.
- With above and also U.S. ground forces in reserve.
- Without U.S. direct support, but with increased RVNAF artillery and air capacity?

13. What, in various views, are the required changes—in RVNAF command, organization, equipment, training and incentives, in political environment, in logistical support, in U.S. modes of influence—for making RVNAF adequate to the tasks cited in questions 9 and 10 above? How long would this take? What are the practical obstacles to these changes, and what new U.S. moves would be needed to overcome these?

PACIFICATION

14. How much, and where, has the security situation and the balance of influence between the VC and NLF actually changed in the countryside over time, contrasting the present to such